German Nihilism

LEO STRAUSS

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The following lecture by Leo Strauss was delivered, according to internal textual evidence, on February 26, 1941, in the General Seminar of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research in New York. The text will prove to be of particular interest both for students of Leo Strauss's thought and for those more generally interested in the intellectual climate of prewar Germany. For the former, the lecture presents itself as one of the rare occasions on which Professor Strauss suspended his customary reticence and directly addressed an important contemporary issue. For the latter, it offers an interesting and compelling outlook on the intellectual currents of one of this century's key periods. Finally, both audiences will find that Professor Strauss combines his philosophical rigor and perspicacity with firsthand knowledge of the problem under discussion. As "a young Jew, born and raised in Germany," he was without doubt well acquainted with the phenomenon of German nihilism, the influence it exerted in postwar and prewar Germany, its key representatives and its historical origins.

The basis of this edition is a typewritten manuscript which can be found in the Leo Strauss Papers (Box 8, Folder 15) at the Regenstein Library of The University of Chicago. The manuscript consists of twenty-five mostly typewritten pages. It bears many corrections and additions, some of them inserted by typewriter, some by hand. In preparing the text, we have systematically incorporated the changes and additions made by Professor Strauss so that the present edition might faithfully reflect his actual presentation. We note the few instances in which we have edited for readability. We have also taken the liberty of correcting, without comment, a few misspellings in the typescript. At some points in the text Professor Strauss made a more substantial addition in handwriting: these are mentioned in the text, with a short comment. In some cases the handwriting was difficult to read or altogether illegible: this is indicated

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between parentheses in the text, as well as in the notes. Certain words were underlined by Professor Strauss, some by typewriter, some by hand: in the present edition these have been italicized. With a view to restricting the number of notes, single words which were either added or underlined by hand are indicated in the text with an asterisk immediately following the word. Words from languages other than English have been italicized by the editors. Finally, we have added some additional information concerning names, sources and dates in the notes.

As the reader will remark, the present edition begins with two different tables of contents. The first of these is part of the original typescript, while the second was found on a handwritten sheet attached to the typescript. The latter, however, provides a more accurate synopsis of the contents of the lecture as it is presented. For this reason, we have chosen to include it directly after the original table of contents.

We are grateful to Professor Jenny Strauss Clay and Professor Joseph Cropsey for their generous help in deciphering Professor Strauss's handwriting. Professor Cropsey, Leo Strauss's literary executor, has also generously given permission for this publication.

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General Seminar: Experiences of the Second World War

February 26, 1941

German Nihilism—Leo Strauss

German Nihilism

I. *The ultimate, non-nihilistic motive underlying German nihilism.*

3. The inseparable connection of morality and the closed society: the moral protest against the principle of modern civilisation.

II. *The situation in which that non-nihilistic motive led to nihilism.*

4. German nihilism is the reaction of a certain type of young atheist to the communist ideal or prediction.

5. On the affinity of youth to nihilism, and the nihilistic consequences of the emancipation of youth.

6. On the affinity of progressivism to nihilism: progressivism leaves the *aim* undefined; it therefore opposes an indefinite No to the given order.

III. *What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be specifically German?*

7. Nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such. Civilisation is the conscious culture of human reason, i.e. science *and* morals.

8. Nihilism in the sense defined is characteristic of present day Germany rather than of any other country.

9. German nihilism rejects the principles of civilisation as such in favor of war and the warlike virtues.

10. German nihilism is therefore akin to German militarism.

11. German nihilism is a radicalized form of German militarism, and that radicalization is due to the victory of the *romantic* opinion concerning the modern development as a whole.

12. German nihilism is related to the *reaction* to the modern ideal which is characteristic of German idealist philosophy: morality of self-sacrifice and self-denial vs. morality of self-interest; courage is the only unambiguously non-utilitarian virtue.

13. German idealism, while opposing Western philosophy, claimed to be a synthesis of the modern ideal with the pre-modern ideal; that synthesis did not work; the influence of German idealism made the acceptance of the modern ideal impossible; the Germans had to fall back on the pre-modern ideal: that is to say, on the pre-modern ideal as *interpreted* by German idealism, i.e., as interpreted in a polemic intention against the enlightenment; and therefore: on a modern *distortion* of the pre-modern ideal.

14. The modern ideal is of *English* origin: the *German* tradition is a tradition of criticism of the modern ideal. While the English found a working amalgamation of the modern ideal with the *classical* ideal, the Germans overemphasized the break in the tradition so much that they were ultimately led from the rejection of *modern* civilisation to the rejection of the principle of civilisation as such, i.e., to nihilism. The English gentlemen as an imperial nation vs. the German *Herren* as a nation of provincial, resentful fanatics.

GERMAN NIHILISM.
LECTURE TO BE DELIVERED ON FEBRUARY, 26, 1941.

1. What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon? I am not able to *answer* these questions; I can merely try to *elaborate** them a little. For the phenomenon which I am going to discuss, is much too complex, and much too little explored, to permit of an adequate description within the short time at my disposal. I cannot do more than to scratch its surface.

2. When we hear at the present time the expression "German nihilism," most of us naturally think at once of National Socialism. It must however be understood from the outset that National Socialism is only the most *famous** form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unenlightened and most dishonourable form. It is probable that its very vulgarity accounts for its great, if appalling, successes. These successes may be followed by failures, and ultimately by complete defeat. Yet the defeat of National Socialism will not necessarily mean the end of German nihilism. For that nihilism has deeper roots than the preachings of Hitler, Germany's defeat in the World War and all that.

To explain German nihilism, I propose to proceed in the following way. I shall first explain the *ultimate motive* which is underlying German nihilism; this motive is not in itself nihilistic. I shall then describe the *situation* in which that non-nihilistic motive led to nihilistic aspirations. Finally, I shall attempt to give such a *definition* of nihilism as is not assailable from the point of view of the non-nihilistic motive in question, and on the basis of that definition,[1] to describe German nihilism somewhat more fully.

3. Nihilism might mean: *velle nihil*, to will the nothing, the destruction of everything, including oneself, and therefore primarily the will to self-destruction. I am told that there are human beings who have such strange desires. I do not believe, however, that such a desire is the ultimate motive of German nihilism. Not only does the unarmed eye not notice any unambiguous signs of a will to *self**-destruction. But even if such a desire were *demonstrated** to be the ultimate motive, we still should be at a loss to understand why that desire took on the form, not of the mood called *fin de siècle* or of alcoholism, but of militarism. To explain German nihilism in terms of mental diseases, is even less advisable than it is to explain in such terms the desire of a cornered gangster to bump off together with himself a couple of cops and the fellow who double-crossed him; not being a Stoic, I could not call *that** desire a morbid desire.[2]

The fact of the matter is that German nihilism is not absolute nihilism, desire for the destruction of everything including oneself, but a desire for the destruction of something *specific*:* of *modern* civilisation. That, if I may say so, limited nihilism *becomes* an *almost** absolute nihilism only for this reason: because the negation of modern civilisation, the No, is not guided, or accompanied, by any clear positive conception.

German nihilism desires the destruction of modern civilisation as far as modern civilisation has a *moral* meaning. As everyone knows, it does not object so much to modern *technical** devices. That moral meaning of modern civilisation to which the German nihilists object, is expressed in formulations such as these: to relieve man's estate; or: to safeguard the rights of man; or: the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number. What is the motive underlying the protest against modern civilisation, against the spirit of the *West**, and in particular of the *Anglo-Saxon** West?

The answer must be: it is a *moral* protest. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the internationalism inherent in modern civilisation, or, more precisely, that the establishment of a perfectly *open* society which is as it were the goal of modern civilisation, and therefore all aspirations directed toward that goal, are irreconcilable with the basic demands of *moral life*. That protest proceeds from the conviction that the root of all moral life is essentially and therefore eternally the *closed* society; from the conviction that the open society is bound to be, if not immoral, at least amoral: the meeting ground of seekers of pleasure, of gain, of irresponsible power, indeed of any kind of irresponsibility and lack of seriousness.[3]

Moral life, it is asserted, means *serious* life. Seriousness, and the ceremonial of seriousness—the flag and the oath to the flag—, are the distinctive features of the *closed* society, of the society which by its very nature, is constantly confronted with, and basically oriented toward, the *Ernstfall*, the serious moment, M-day, *war*. Only life in such a *tense* atmosphere, only a life which is based on constant awareness of the *sacrifices** to which it owes its existence, and of the necessity, the *duty* of sacrifice of life and all worldly goods, is truly human: the sublime is unknown to the open society.[4] The societies of the West which claim to aspire toward the open society, actually are closed societies in a state of disintegration: their moral value, their respectability, depends *entirely* on their still being closed societies.

Let us pursue this argument a little further. The open society, it is asserted, is actually impossible. Its possibility is not proved at all by what is called the *progress** toward the open society. For that progress is largely fictitious or merely verbal. Certain basic facts of human nature which have been honestly recognized by earlier generations who used to call a spade a spade, are at the present time verbally denied, superficially covered over by fictions legal and others, e.g., by the belief that one can abolish war by pacts not backed by military forces punishing him who breaks the pact, or by calling ministries of *war** ministries of *defence*,* or by calling punishment sanctions, or by calling capital punishment *das höchste Strafmass*.[5] The open society is morally inferior to the closed society also* because the former is *based* on hypocrisy.

The conviction underlying the protest against modern civilisation has *basically* nothing to do with bellicism, with *love* of war; nor with nationalism: for there were closed societies which were not nations; it has indeed something to

do with what is called the sovereign state, insofar as the sovereign state offers the best modern example of a closed society in the sense indicated. The conviction I am trying to describe, is *not*, to repeat, in its origin a love of war: it is rather a love of morality, a sense of responsibility for endangered morality. The historians in our midst know that conviction, or passion, from Glaukon's, Plato's brother's, passionate protest against the city of pigs, in the name of noble virtue. They know it, above all, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilisation of the century of taste, and from Friedrich Nietzsche's passionate protest against the easy-going and somewhat rotten civilisation of the century of industry. It was the *same* passion—let there be no mistake about that—which turned, if in a much more passionate and infinitely less intelligent form, against the alleged or real corruption of post-war Germany: against "the subhuman beings of the big cities (*die Untermenschen der Grossstadt*)," against "cultural bolshevism (*Kulturbolschewismus*)," etc. That passion, or conviction is then not in itself nihilistic, as is shown by the examples of Plato and Rousseau, if examples are needed at all. (One may even wonder whether it was not a *sound* demand, remembering, e.g., the decision of the Oxford students not to fight for king and country and some more recent facts.) While not being nihilistic in itself, and perhaps even not entirely unsound, that conviction *led* however to nihilism in post-war Germany owing to a number of circumstances. Of those circumstances, I shall mention in the survey which follows, only those which, to my mind, have not been sufficiently emphasized in the discussions of this seminar nor in the literature on the subject.[6]

4. One would have to possess a gift which I totally lack, the gift of a lyrical reporter, in order to give those of you who have not lived for many years in post-war Germany, an adequate* idea of the *emotions* underlying German nihilism.[7] Let me tentatively define nihilism as the desire to destroy the present world and its potentialities, a desire not accompanied by any clear conception of what one wants to put in its place. And let us try to understand how such a desire could develop.

No one could be satisfied with the post-war world. German liberal democracy of all descriptions seemed to many people to be absolutely unable to cope with the difficulties with which Germany was confronted. This created a profound prejudice, or confirmed a profound prejudice already in existence, against liberal democracy as such. Two articulate alternatives to liberal democracy were open. One was simple reaction, as expressed by the Crown Prince Ruprecht of Bavaria in about these terms: "Some people say that the wheel of history cannot be turned back. This is an error." The other alternative was more interesting. The older ones in our midst still remember the time when certain people asserted that the conflicts inherent in the present situation would necessarily lead to a revolution, accompanying or following another World War—a rising of the proletariat and of the proletarianized strata of society which would usher in the

withering away of the State, the classless society, the abolition of all exploitation and injustice, the era of final peace. It was this prospect at least as much as the desperate present, which led to nihilism. The prospect of a pacified planet, without rulers and ruled, of a planetary society devoted to production and consumption only, to the production and consumption of spiritual as well as material merchandise, was positively horrifying to quite a few very intelligent and very decent, if very young, Germans. They did not object to that prospect because they were worrying about their own economic and social position; for certainly in that respect they had no longer anything to lose. Nor did they object to it for religious reasons; for, as one of their spokesmen (E. Jünger) said, they *knew** that they were the* sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of godless men. What they hated, was the very prospect of a world in which everyone would be happy and satisfied, in which everyone would have his little pleasure by day and his little pleasure by night, a world in which no great heart could beat and no great soul could breathe, a world without real, unmetaphoric, sacrifice, i.e. a world without blood, sweat, and tears. What to the communists appeared to be the fulfilment of *the* dream of mankind, appeared to those young Germans as the greatest debasement of humanity, as the coming of the end of humanity, as the arrival of the latest man. They did not really know, and thus they were unable to express in a tolerably clear language, what they desired to put in the place of the present world and its allegedly necessary future or sequel: the only thing of which they were absolutely certain was that the present world and all the potentialities of the present world as such, must be destroyed in order to prevent the otherwise necessary coming of the communist final order: literally anything, the *nothing*,* the chaos, the jungle, the Wild West, the Hobbian state of nature, seemed to them infinitely better than the communist-anarchist-pacifist future.[8] Their Yes was inarticulate—they were unable to say more than: No! This No proved however sufficient as *the* preface to action, to the action of destruction. This is the phenomenon which occurs to me first whenever I hear the expression German nihilism.

It is hardly necessary to point out the fallacy committed by the young men in question. They simply took over the communist thesis that the proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship is necessary, if civilisation is not to perish. But they insisted rather more than the communists on the conditional character of the communist prediction (*if* civilisation is not to perish). That condition left room for *choice*: they chose what according to the communists was the only alternative to communism. In other words: they admitted that all rational argument was in favour of communism; but they opposed to that apparently invincible argument what they called "irrational decision." Unfortunately, all rational argument they knew of, was *historical* argument, or more precisely: statements about the probable future, *predictions*, which were based on analysis of the past, and above all, of the present. For that modern astrology, predicting social

science, had taken hold of a very large part of the academic youth. I have emphasized before that the nihilists were *young* people.[9]

5. One or the other modern pedagogue would perhaps feel that not everything was bad in that nihilism. For, he might argue, it is not unnatural that the intelligent section of a young generation should be dissatisfied with what they are told to believe by the older generation, and that they should have a strong desire for a *new* word, for a word expressing *their* longings, and, considering that moderation is not a virtue of youth, for an *extreme* word. Moreover, he would conceivably say, it is not unnatural that the young people, being constitutionally unable to discover that new word, are unable to express in articulate language more than the negation of the aspirations of the older generation. A lover of paradoxes might be tempted to assert an essential affinity of youth to nihilism. I should be the last to deny the juvenile character of that specific nihilism which I have tried to describe. But I must disagree with the modern pedagogue all the more in so far as I am convinced that about the most dangerous thing for these young men was precisely what is called progressive education: they rather needed *old-fashioned teachers*, such old-fashioned teachers of course as would be undogmatic enough to understand the aspirations of their pupils. Unfortunately, the belief in old-fashioned teaching declined considerably in post-war Germany. The inroads which William II had made on the old and noble educational system founded by great liberals of the early 19th century, were not discontinued, but rather enlarged by the Republic. To this one may add the influence of the *political* emancipation of youth, the fact frequently referred to as the children's vote. Nor ought we to forget that some of the young nihilists who refused to undergo severe *intellectual discipline*,* were sons or younger brothers of men and women who had undergone what may be described as the *emotional discipline* of the youth movement, of a movement which preached the *emancipation* of youth. Our century has once been called the century of the child: in Germany it proved to be the age of the adolescent. Needless to say that not in all cases was* the natural progress from adolescence to senility ever interrupted by a period however short of maturity. The decline of reverence for old age found its most telling expression in Hitler's shameless reference to the imminent death of the aged President Hindenburg.

I have alluded to the fact that the young nihilists were *atheists*. Broadly speaking, prior to the World War, atheism was a preserve of the radical left, just as throughout history atheism had been connected with philosophic materialism. German philosophy was predominantly idealistic, and the German idealists were theists or pantheists. Schopenhauer was, to my knowledge, the first non-materialist *and* conservative German philosopher who openly professed his atheism. But Schopenhauer's influence fades into insignificance, if compared with that of *Nietzsche*. Nietzsche asserted that the atheist assumption is not only reconcilable with, but indispensable for, a radical anti-democratic, anti-socialist, and anti-pacifist policy: according to him, even the communist creed is only a

secularized form of theism, of the belief in providence. There is no other philosopher whose influence on postwar German thought is comparable to that of Nietzsche, of the *atheist* Nietzsche. I cannot dwell on this important point, since I am not a theologian. A gentleman who is much more versed in theology than I am—Professor Carl Mayer of the Graduate Faculty—will certainly devote to this aspect of German nihilism all the attention it requires in an article to be published in *Social Research*.[10]

The adolescents I am speaking of, were in need of teachers who could explain to them in articulate language the positive, and not merely destructive, meaning of their aspirations. They believed to have found such teachers in that group of professors and writers who knowingly or ignorantly paved the way for Hitler (Spengler, Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, [illegible], Ernst Jünger, Heidegger). If we want to understand the singular success, not of Hitler, but of those writers, we must cast a quick glance at their opponents who were at the same time the opponents of the young nihilists. Those opponents committed frequently a grave mistake. They believed to have refuted the No by refuting the Yes, i.e. the inconsistent, if not silly, positive assertions of the young men. But one cannot refute what one has not *thoroughly* understood. And many opponents did not even *try* to understand the ardent passion underlying the negation of the present world and its potentialities. As a consequence, the very refutations confirmed the nihilists in their belief; all these refutations seemed to beg the question; most of the refutations seemed to consist of *pueris decantata*, of repetitions of things which the young people knew already by heart. Those young men had come to doubt seriously, and not merely methodically or methodologically, the *principles** of modern civilisation; the great authorities of that civilisation did no longer impress them; it was evident that only such opponents would have been listened to who knew that doubt from their own experience, who through years of hard and independent thinking had overcome it. Many opponents did not meet that condition. They had been brought up in the belief in the principles of modern civilisation; and a belief in which one is brought up, is apt to degenerate into *prejudice*.* Consequently, the attitude of the opponents of the young nihilists tended to become *apologetic*. Thus it came to pass that the most ardent upholders of the principle of progress, of an essentially *aggressive* principle, were compelled to take a defensive stand; and, in the realm of the mind, taking a defensive stand looks like admitting defeat. The ideas of modern civilisation appeared to the *young* generation to be the *old* ideas; thus the adherents of the ideal of progress were in the awkward position that they had to resist, in the manner of *conservateurs*, what in the meantime has been called the wave of the future. They made the impression of being loaded with the heavy burden of a tradition hoary with age and somewhat dusty, whereas the young nihilists, not hampered by any tradition, had complete freedom of movement—and in the wars of the mind no less than in real wars, freedom of action spells victory. The opponents of the young nihilists had all the advantages,

but likewise all the disabilities, of the intellectually propertied class confronted by the intellectual proletarian, the sceptic. The situation of modern civilisation in general, and of its backbone, which is modern science, both natural and civil in particular, appeared to be comparable to that of scholasticism shortly before the emergence of the new science of the 17th century: the technical perfection of the methods and terminology of the old school, communism included, appeared to be a strong argument *against* the old school. For technical perfection is apt to hide the basic problems. Or, if you wish, the bird of the goddess of wisdom starts its flight only* when the sun is setting. It was certainly characteristic of German post-war thought that the output of technical terms, at no time negligible in Germany, reached astronomic proportions. The only answer which could have impressed the young nihilists, had to be given in non-technical language. Only one answer was given which was adequate and which would have impressed the young nihilists if they had heard it. It was not however given by a German and it was given in the year 1940 only. Those young men who refused to believe that the period following the jump into liberty, following the communist world revolution, would be the finest hour of mankind in general and of Germany in particular, would have been impressed as much as we were, by what Winston Churchill said after the defeat in Flanders about Britain's finest hour. For one of their greatest teachers had taught them to see in Cannæ the greatest moment in the life of that glory which was ancient* Rome.[11] (Spengler)

6. I have tried to circumscribe the intellectual and moral situation in which a nihilism emerged which was not in all cases base in its origin. Moreover, I take it for granted that not everything to which the young nihilists objected, was unobjectionable, and that not every writer or speaker whom they despised, was respectable. Let us beware of a sense of solidarity which is not limited by discretion. And let us not forget that the highest duty of the scholar, truthfulness or justice, acknowledges no limits. Let us then not hesitate to look for one moment at the phenomenon which I called nihilism, from the point of view of the nihilists themselves. "Nihilism," they would say, is a slogan used by those who do not understand the new, who see merely the rejection of *their* cherished ideals, the destruction of *their* spiritual property, who judge the new by its first words and deeds, which are, of necessity, a caricature rather than an adequate expression. How can a reasonable man expect an adequate expression of the ideal of a new epoch at its beginning, considering that the owl of Minerva starts its flight when the sun is setting? The Nazis? Hitler? The less is said about him, the better. He will soon be forgotten. He is merely the rather contemptible *tool* of "History": the midwife who assists at the birth of the new epoch, of a new spirit; and a midwife usually understands nothing of the genius at whose birth she assists; she is not even supposed to be a competent gynæcologist. A new reality is in the making; it is transforming the whole world; in the meantime there is: nothing, but—a fertile nothing. The Nazis are as unsubstantial as clouds; the sky is hidden at present by those* clouds which announce a devas-

tating storm, but at the same time the long-needed rain which will bring new life to the dried up soil; and (here I am almost quoting) do not lose hope; what appears to you the end of the world, is merely the end of an epoch, of the epoch which began in 1517 or so. —I frankly confess, I do not see how those can resist the voice of that siren who expect the answer to the first and the last question from "History," from the future *as such*;* who mistake analysis of the present or past or future for philosophy; who believe in a progress toward a goal which is itself progressive and therefore undefinable; who are not guided by a *known* and *stable* standard: by a standard which is stable and not changeable, and which is known and not merely believed. In other words, the lack of resistance to nihilism seems to be due ultimately to the depreciation and the contempt of reason, which is one and unchangeable or it is not, and of science. For if reason is changeable, it is dependent on those forces which cause its changes; it is a servant or slave of the *emotions*; and it will be hard to make a distinction which is not arbitrary, between noble and base emotions, once one has denied the rulership of reason. A German who could boast of a life-long intimate intercourse with the superhuman father of all nihilism, has informed us as* reliably, as we were ever informed by any inspired author, that the originator of all nihilism admitted: "Just despise reason and science, the very highest power of man, and I have got you completely."[12]

7. I had to condense a number of recollections of what I have heard, seen, and read while I was living in Germany, into the foregoing fragmentary remarks, because I had to convey an *impression* of an irrational movement and of the frequently irrational reactions to it, rather than a reasoned argument. I have now, however, reached the point where I can venture to submit a definition of nihilism. I do this not without trepidation. Not because the definition which I am going to suggest, does not live up to the requirements of an orderly* definition (for I know that sins of that kind are the ones which are more easily forgiven); nor because it is in any way novel, but for precisely the opposite reason.[13] It will seem to most of you that it is a commonplace and that it consists of commonplaces. The only thing which I can say to justify myself, is this: I expected to find a definition of nihilism as a matter of course in Mr. Rauschning's well-known book. Only my failure to discover such a definition in that book, gives me the courage to indulge in what you will consider a triviality, if a necessary triviality.

I shall then say: Nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such. A nihilist is then a man who *knows* the principles of civilisation, if only in a superficial way. A merely uncivilised man, a savage, is not a nihilist. This is the difference between Ariovistus, the Teutonic chieftain whom Caesar defeated, and Hitler who otherwise have the characteristic qualities of the perfect barbarian (arrogance and cruelty) in common. The Roman soldier who disturbed the circles of Archimedes, was not a nihilist, but just a soldier. I said *civilisation*, and not: *culture*. For I have noticed that many nihilists are great

lovers of culture, as distinguished from, and opposed to, civilisation. Besides, the term *culture* leaves it undetermined what the thing is which is to be cultivated (blood and soil or the mind), whereas the term civilisation designates at once the process of making man a citizen, and not a slave; an inhabitant of cities, and not a rustic; a lover of peace, and not of war; a polite being, and not a ruffian. A tribal community may possess a culture, i.e. produce, and enjoy, hymns, songs, ornament of their clothes, of their weapons and pottery, dances,* fairy tales and what not; it cannot however be civilised.[14] I wonder whether* the fact that Western man lost much of his former pride, a quiet and becoming pride, of his being civilised, is not at the bottom of the present lack of resistance to nihilism.

I shall try to be somewhat more precise. By civilisation, we understand the conscious culture of humanity, i.e. of that which makes a human being a human being, i e. the conscious* culture of reason. Human reason is active, above all, in two ways: as regulating human conduct, and as attempting to understand whatever can be understood by man; as practical reason, and as theoretical reason. The pillars of civilisation are therefore morals and science, and both united. For science without morals degenerates into cynicism, and thus destroys the basis of the scientific effort itself; and morals without science degenerates into superstition and thus is apt to become fanatic cruelty. Science is the attempt to understand the universe and man; it is therefore identical with philosophy; it is not necessarily identical with *modern** science. By morals, we understand the rules of decent and noble conduct, as a reasonable man would understand them; those rules are by their nature applicable to any human being, although we may allow for the possibility that not all human beings have an equal natural aptitude for decent and noble conduct. Even the most violent sceptic cannot help from time to time despising, or at least excusing, this or that action and this or that man; a complete analysis of what is implied in such an action of despising, or even excusing, would lead to that well-known view of morals which I sketched. For our present purpose it will suffice if I illustrate decent and noble conduct by the remark that it is equally remote from inability to inflict physical or other pain as from deriving pleasure from inflicting pain.[15] Or by the other remark that decent and noble conduct has to do, not so much with the natural *aim* of man, as with the *means* toward that aim: the view that the end sanctifies the means, is a tolerably complete expression* of immoralism.

I deliberately excluded "art" from the definition of civilisation. Hitler, the best-known champion of nihilism, is famous for his love of art and is even an artist himself. But I never heard that he had anything to do with search for truth or with any attempt to instill the seeds of virtue into the souls of his subjects. I am confirmed in this prejudice concerning "art" by the observation that the founding fathers of civilisation who taught us what science is and what morals are, did not know the term art as it is in use since about 180 years, nor the term, and the discipline, aesthetics which is of equally recent origin. This is not to

deny, but rather to assert, that there are close relations between science and morals on the one hand, and poetry and the other imitative arts on the other; but those relations are bound to be misunderstood, to the detriment of both science and morals as well as of poetry, if science and morals are not considered *the* pillars of civilisation.[16]

The definition which I suggested, has another implication, or advantage, which I must make explicit.[17] I tentatively defined, at the beginning, nihilism as the desire to destroy the present civilisation, *modern* civilisation. By my second definition I intended to make clear that one cannot call the most radical critic of *modern* civilisation as such, a nihilist.

Civilisation is the conscious culture of reason. This means that civilisation is not identical with human life or human existence. There were, and there are, many human beings who do not partake of civilisation. Civilisation has a natural basis which it *finds*, which it does not create, on which it is dependent, and on which it has only a very limited influence. Conquest of nature, if not taken as a highly poetic overstatement, is a nonsensical expression. The natural basis of civilisation shows itself for instance in the fact that all civilised communities as well as uncivilised ones are in need of armed force which they must use against their enemies from without and against the criminals within.

8. I presume, it is not necessary to prove that nihilism in the sense defined is dominant in Germany, and that nihilism characterizes at present Germany more than any other country. Japan, e.g., cannot be as nihilistic as Germany, because Japan has been much less civilised in the sense defined than was Germany. If nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilisation as such, and if civilisation is based on recognition of the fact that the subject of civilisation is man as man, every interpretation of science and morals in terms of races, or of nations, or of cultures, is strictly speaking nihilistic. Whoever accepts the idea of a Nordic or German or Faustic science, e.g., rejects *eo ipso* the *idea* of science. Different "cultures" may have produced different types of "science"; but only one of them can be *true*, can be *science*.[18] The nihilist implication of the nationalist interpretation of science in particular can be described somewhat differently in the following terms. Civilisation is inseparable from *learning*, from the desire to learn from anyone who can teach us something worthwhile. The nationalist interpretation of science or philosophy implies that we cannot really learn anything worthwhile from people who do not belong to our nation or our culture. The few Greeks whom we usually have in mind when we speak of *the* Greeks, were distinguished from the barbarians, so to speak exclusively by their willingness to learn—even from barbarians; whereas the barbarian, the non-Greek barbarian as well as the Greek barbarian, believes that all his questions are solved by, or on the basis of, *his* ancestral tradition. Naturally, a man who would limit himself to asserting that one nation may have a greater aptitude to understanding phenomena of a certain type than other nations, would not be a

nihilist: not the accidental *fate* of science or morals, but its essential *intention* is decisive for the definition of civilisation and therewith of nihilism.

9. The nihilists in general, and the German nihilists in particular reject the principles of civilisation as such. The question arises, in favor of what do the German nihilists reject those principles? I shall try to answer that question to begin with on the basis of Mr. Rauschning's book.[19] This will give me an opportunity to elucidate somewhat more the foregoing definition of nihilism.

Mr. Rauschning has called the foreign and domestic policy of the Nazis "the revolution of nihilism." This means: it is not, as it claims to be, "a new order in the making," but "the wasteful and destructive exploitation of irreplaceable resources, material, mental, and moral, accumulated through generations of fruitful labor" (XI). This would mean that N.S. is nihilistic in its effect, but it does not necessarily mean that it is nihilistic in its intention. What Rauschning says in this passage quoted about the Nazis, might conceivably be* said of the Communist revolution as well. And yet, one cannot call communism a nihilist movement. If the communist revolution is nihilist, it is so in its consequences, but not in its intention. This reminds me of another remark of Rauschning's: he identifies nihilism with the "destruction of all traditional spiritual standards" (XII). What I object to, is the use of the term *traditional** in the definition of nihilism. It is evident that not all traditional spiritual standards are, by their nature, beyond criticism and even rejection: we seek what is good, and not what we have inherited, to quote Aristotle. In other words, I believe it is dangerous, if the opponents of National Socialism withdraw to a mere conservatism which defines its ultimate goal by a specific *tradition.** The temptation to fall back from an unimpressive present on an impressive past—and every past is as such impressive—is very great indeed. We ought not, however, cede to that temptation, if for no other reason, at least for this that *the* Western tradition is not so homogeneous as it may appear as long as one is engaged in polemics or in apologetics. To mention one example out of many: the great tradition of which Voltaire is a representative, is hard to reconcile with the tradition of which Bellarmine is a representative, even if both traditions should be equally hostile to National Socialism.[20] Besides, I wish, Mr. Rauschning had not spoken of *spiritual* standards; this savours of the view that materialism is essentially nihilistic; I believe that materialism is an error, but I have only to recall the names of Democritus and Hobbes in order to realize that materialism is *not* essentially nihilistic. Not to mention the fact that a certain anti-materialism or idealism is at the bottom of German nihilism.

Rauschning operates on somewhat safer ground when he stresses the Nazis' lack of any settled aims. He understands then by German nihilism the "permanent revolution of sheer destruction" for the sake of destruction, a "revolution for its own sake" (248). He stresses the "aimlessness" of the Nazis; he says that they have no program except action; that they replace doctrine by tactics (75); he calls their revolution "a revolution without a doctrine" (55); he speaks of the "total

rejection" by the Nazis "of any sort of doctrine" (56). This appears to be an exaggeration. For elsewhere Rauschning says: "One thing National Socialism is not: a doctrine or philosophy. Yet it *has* a philosophy." (23). Or: "the fight against Judaism, while it is beyond question a central element not only in material considerations, but in those of cultural policy, is part of the party doctrine" (22).[21]

Their anti-Jewish policy does seem to be taken seriously by the Nazis. But even if it were true, that no single point of the original party program or party doctrine had a more than provisional and tactical meaning, we still should be at a loss to understand a party, a government, a State—not merely without a program or doctrine—but without any *aims*. For it seems hard to conceive how any human being can act without having an aim. John Dillinger probably had no program, but he doubtless had an aim. In other words: Rauschning has not considered carefully enough the difference between program and aim. If he defines nihilism as a political movement without aims, then he defines a nonentity; if he defines nihilism as a political movement without a program or doctrine, then he would have to call all opportunists nihilists, which would be too uncharitable to be true.[22]

As a matter of fact, Rauschning does not always deny that the Nazis have aims: "a permanent revolution of sheer destruction by means of which a dictatorship of brute force maintains itself in power" (xɪf.). Here, Rauschning *states* the aim of the Nazis: that aim is their power; they do not destroy in order to destroy, but in order to maintain themselves in power.[23] Now, to keep themselves in power, they depend, to a certain extent, on their ability to make their subjects, the Germans, happy, on their ability to satisfy the needs of the Germans. This means, as matters stand, that, in order to maintain themselves in power, they must embark upon a policy of aggression, a policy directed toward world-dominion.

Rauschning corrects his remark about the aimlessness of the Nazis by saying "the German aims are indefinite to-day only because they are infinite" (275). Their "goal" is "the world-wide totalitarian empire" (58). They have not only aims, their aims form even a hierarchy leading up to a principal aim: "the principal aim, the redistribution of the world" (229). German nihilism, as described by Rauschning, is then the aspiration to world-dominion exercised by the Germans who are dominated in their turn by a German *élite*; that aspiration becomes nihilistic, because it uses *any* means to achieve its end and thus destroys everything which makes life worth living for any decent or intelligent being. However low an opinion we may have of the Nazis, I am inclined to believe that they desire German world-dominion not merely as a means for keeping themselves in power, but that they derive, so to speak, a disinterested pleasure from the prospect of that glamorous goal "Germany ruling the world." I should even go one step further and say that the Nazis probably derive a disinterested pleasure from the aspect of those human qualities which enable nations to conquer. I am certain that the Nazis consider any pilot of a bomber or any submarine commander absolutely superior in human dignity to any traveling salesman or to any physician or to the representative of any other relatively peaceful occupation. For, a German nihilist much more intelligent and much more educated than Hitler himself has stated: "What kind of minds are those who do not even know this much: that no mind *can* be more profound and more knowing than that of *any* soldier who fell anywhere at the Somme or in Flanders? *This* is the standard of which we are in need." ("Was aber sind das für Geister, die noch nicht einmal wissen, dass kein Geist tiefer und wissender sein kann als der jedes beliebigen Soldaten, der irgendwo an der Somme oder in Flandern fiel? Dies ist der Massstab, dessen wir bedürftig sind." Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 201.)[24] The admiration of the warrior as a type, the unconditional preference given to the warrior as warrior, is however not only *genuine* in German nihilism: it is even its distinctive feature. Our question: in favor of what does German nihilism reject the principles of civilisation as such must therefore be answered by the statement: that it rejects those principles in favor of the military virtues. This is what Mr. Rauschning must have had in mind when speaking of "*heroic* nihilism"(21).

War is a destructive business. And if war is considered more noble than peace, if war, and not peace, is considered *the* aim, the aim is for all practical purposes nothing other than destruction. There is reason for believing that the business of destroying, and killing, and torturing is a source of an almost disinterested pleasure to the Nazis as such, that they derive a genuine pleasure from the aspect of the strong and ruthless who subjugate, exploit, and torture the weak and helpless.[25]

10. German nihilism rejects then the principles of civilisation as such in favor of war and conquest, in favor of the warlike virtues. German nihilism is therefore akin to German militarism. This compels us to raise the question what militarism is. Militarism can be identified as the view expressed by the older Moltke in these terms: "Eternal peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one."[26] To believe that eternal peace is a dream, is not militarism, but perhaps plain commonsense; it is at any rate not bound up with a particular moral taste. But to believe that eternal peace is not a *beautiful* dream, is tantamount to believing that war is something desirable in itself; and to believe that war is something desirable in itself, betrays a cruel, inhuman disposition. The view that war is good in itself, implies the rejection of the distinction between just and unjust wars, between wars of defence and wars of aggression. It is ultimately irreconcilable with the very idea of a law of nations.

11. German nihilism is *akin* to German militarism, but it is *not identical** with it. Militarism always made at least the *attempt** to reconcile the ideal of war with *Kultur*; nihilism however* is based on the assumption that *Kultur* is finished. Militarism always recognized that the virtues of peace are of equal dignity, or almost equal dignity, with the virtues of war. When denying that the rules of decency cannot be applied to foreign policy, it never denied the validity

of those rules as regards home policy or private life. It never asserted that science is essentially national; it merely asserted that the Germans happen to be the teachers of the lesser breeds. German nihilism on the other hand asserts that the military virtues, and in particular courage as the ability to bear any physical pain, the virtue of the red Indian, is the only virtue *left* (see Jünger's essay on pain in *Blätter und Steine*). The only virtue *left*: the implication is that we live in an age of decline, of the decline of the West, in an age of civilisation as distinguished from, and opposed to culture; or in an age of mechanic society as distinguished from, and opposed to, organic community. In that condition of debasement, only the most elementary virtue, the first virtue, that virtue with which man and human society stands and falls, is capable to grow. Or, to express the same view somewhat differently: in an age of utter corruption, the only remedy possible is to destroy the edifice of corruption—"das *System*"—and to return to the uncorrupted and incorruptible *origin*, to the condition of *potential*,* and not actual, culture or civilisation: the characteristic virtue of that stage of merely *potential** culture or civilisation, of the *state of nature*, is courage and nothing else. German nihilism is then a radicalized form of German militarism, and that radicalization is due to the fact that during the last generation the *romantic* judgment about the whole modern development, and therefore in particular about the present, has become much more generally accepted than it ever was even in 19th century *Germany*.*[27] By romantic judgment, I understand a judgment which is guided by the opinion that an absolutely superior order of human things existed during some period of the recorded past.

12. However great the difference between German militarism and German nihilism may be: the kinship of the two aspirations is obvious. German militarism is the *father* of German nihilism. A thorough understanding of German nihilism would therefore require a thorough understanding of German militarism. Why has Germany such a particular aptitude for militarism? A few, extremely sketchy remarks must here suffice.

To explain German militarism, it is not sufficient to refer to the fact that German civilisation is considerably *younger* than the civilisation of the Western nations, that Germany is therefore perceivably nearer to barbarism than are the Western countries. For the civilisation of the Slavonic nations is still younger than that of the Germans, and the Slavonic nations do not appear to be as militaristic as are* the Germans. To discover the root of German militarism, it might be wiser to disregard the *prehistory** of German civilisation, and to look at the history of German civilisation itself. Germany reached the hey-day of her letters and her thought during the period from 1760 to 1830; i.e. *after* the elaboration of the ideal of *modern* civilisation had been finished almost completely, and while a *revision* of that ideal, or a *reaction* to that ideal, took place. The ideal of *modern* civilisation is of English and French origin; it is not of German origin. What the meaning of that ideal is, is, of course, a highly controversial question. If I am not greatly mistaken, one can define the tendency of the intellectual development which as it were exploded in the French Revolution, in the following terms: to lower the moral standards, the moral claims, which previously had been made by all responsible teachers, but to take better care than those earlier teachers had done, for the putting into practice, into political and legal practice, of the rules of human conduct. The way in which this was most effectually achieved, was the identification of morality with an attitude of claiming one's *rights*, or with enlightened self-interest, or the reduction of honesty to the best policy; or the solution of the conflict between common interest and private interest by means of industry and trade. (The two most famous philosophers: Descartes, his *générosité*, and no justice, no duties; Locke: where there is no property, there is no justice.) Against that debasement of morality, and against the concomitant decline of a truly philosophic spirit, the thought of Germany stood up, to the lasting honour of Germany. It was however precisely this reaction to the spirit of the 17th and 18th century which laid the foundation for German militarism as far as it is an intellectual phenomenon. Opposing the identification of the morally good with the object of enlightened self-interest however enlightened, the German philosophers insisted on the *difference** between the morally good and self-interest, between the *honestum* and the* *utile*; they insisted on self-*sacrifice** and self-*denial*;* they insisted on it so much, that they were apt to forget the natural aim of man which is happiness; happiness and utility as well as commonsense (*Verständigkeit*) became almost bad names in German philosophy. Now, the difference between the noble and the useful, between duty and self-interest is *most* visible in the case of one virtue, courage, military virtue: the consummation of the actions of every other virtue is, or may be, *rewarded*; it actually *pays* to be just, temperate, urbane, munificent etc.; the consummation of the actions of courage, i.e. death on the field of honour, death for one's country, is *never* rewarded: it is the flower of self-sacrifice.[28] Courage is the only unambiguously unutilitarian virtue. In defending menaced morality, i.e. non-mercenary morality, the German philosophers were tempted to overstress the dignity of military virtue, and in very important cases, in the cases of Fichte, Hegel, and Nietzsche, they succumbed to that temptation. In this and in various other ways, German philosophy created a peculiarly German tradition of contempt for commonsense and the aims of human life, as they are visualized by commonsense.

However deep the difference between German philosophy and the philosophy of the Western countries may be: German philosophy ultimately conceived of itself as a *synthesis* of the pre-modern ideal and the ideal of the modern period. That synthesis did not work: in the 2nd half of the 19th century, it was overrun by Western positivism, the natural child of the enlightenment. Germany had been educated by her philosophers in contempt of Western philosophy (*Je méprise Locke*, is a saying of Schelling's); she now observed that the synthesis effected by her philosophers, of the pre-modern ideal and the modern ideal did not work; she saw no way out except to purify German thought completely from the influence of the ideas of modern civilisation, and to return to the pre-

pre-modern ideal. National Socialism is the most famous, because the most vulgar, example of such a return to a pre-modern ideal. On its highest level, it was a return to what may be called the pre-literary stage of philosophy, pre-socratic philosophy. On *all* levels, the pre-modern ideal was not a *real* pre-modern ideal, but a pre-modern ideal *as interpreted** by the German idealists, i.e. interpreted with a polemic intention against the philosophy of the 17th and 18th century, and therefore distorted.[29]

Of all German philosophers, and indeed of *all* philosophers, none exercised a greater influence on post-war Germany, none was more responsible for the emergence of German nihilism, than was Nietzsche. The relation of Nietzsche to the German Nazi* revolution is comparable to the relation of Rousseau to the French revolution. That is to say: by interpreting Nietzsche in the light of the German revolution, one is very unjust to Nietzsche, but one is not *absolutely* unjust. It may not be amiss to quote one or the other passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, which are related to our subject: "That is no philosophic race, these Englishmen. Bacon represents an *attack* on the philosophic spirit as such. Hobbes, Hume and Locke are a degradation and debasement of the very concept of "philosopher" for more than a century. *Against* Hume, Kant stood up and stood out. It was Locke, of whom Schelling was *entitled** to say *Je méprise Locke*. In the fight against English mechanist interpretation of nature [Newton], Hegel and Schopenhauer and Goethe were unanimous." "That what one calls the modern ideas, or the ideas of the 18th century, or even the French ideas, that ideal, in a word, against which the German spirit stood up with profound disgust—it is of *English* origin, there can be no doubt about that. The French have merely been the imitators and actors of those ideas, besides their best soldiers, and also, unfortunately, their first and most complete victims." (aph. 252 f.) I believe that Nietzsche is substantially correct in asserting that *the** German tradition is very critical of the ideals of modern civilisation, and those ideals are of *English* origin. He forgets however to add that the English almost always had the very un-German prudence and moderation not to throw out the baby with the bath, i.e. the prudence to conceive of the modern ideals as a reasonable adaptation of the old and eternal ideal of decency, of rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances. This taking things easy, this muddling through, this crossing the bridge when one comes to it, may have done some harm to the radicalism of English thought; but it proved to be a blessing to English life; the English never indulged in those radical breaks with traditions which played such a role on the continent. Whatever may be wrong with the peculiarly modern ideal: the very Englishmen who originated it, were at the same time versed in the classical tradition, and the English always kept in store a substantial amount of the necessary counterpoison. While the English originated the modern ideal—the pre-modern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity, was no where better preserved than in Oxford and Cambridge.[30]

[Editors' note: following this, the sentence "Whatever may be the outcome of this war, it are the English, and not the Germans, who deserve to have an empire" has been crossed out. A "+" sign above it refers to a handwritten paragraph at the bottom of the page, indicating it should be inserted as a replacement at this point in the text.]

The present Anglo-German war is then of symbolic significance. In defending modern civilisation against German nihilism, the English are defending the eternal principles of civilisation. No one can tell what will be the outcome of this war. But this much is clear beyond any doubt: by choosing Hitler for their leader in the crucial moment, in which the question of who is to exercise military rule became the order of the day, the Germans ceased to have any *rightful* claim to be more than a provincial nation; it is the English, and not the Germans, who *deserve* to be, and to *remain*, an *imperial* nation: [Editors' note: at this point the handwritten insertion ends, and the typescript continues] for only the English, and not the Germans, have understood that in order to *deserve** to exercise imperial rule, *regere imperio populos*, one must have learned for a very long time to spare the vanquished and to crush the arrogant: *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*.[31]

NOTES

1. The typescript reads "and to describe, on the basis of that definition": a handwritten sign indicates the order should be reversed.

2. The typescript reads "I could not call *that* desire morbid." The words "a" before the word "morbid" and the word "desire" following it have been added by hand.

3. For the distinction between "closed society and open society," see Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, chaps. 1 and 4. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).

4. Preceding "Moral life" is a sentence beginning with a few illegible handwritten words and continuing in typewriting with "the typical representation of the open society is believed to be Hollywood." Both the handwritten words and the typewritten sentence have been crossed out.

The words "—the flag and the oath to the flag—" have been inserted by hand.

Comma after "existence" inserted by hand.

5. The words ", it is asserted," have been inserted by hand.

Above the word "recognized," the word "faced" has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

The typescript reads "generations who called a spade a spade." The words "used to" have been inserted by hand, while the last two letters of "called" have been crossed out.

"e.g." added by hand to replace "i.e.," which has been crossed out.

At the end of the sentence, the words "or by calling capital punishment *Strafmass*" have been added by hand.

6. After "insofar as the sovereign state" the typescript includes "[. . .], the perfect society which does not have a superior, [. . .]," which has been crossed out.

"offers" replaces "is," which has been crossed out.

"the best modern example," added by hand, replaces "the only important contemporary example," which has been crossed out.

In the typescript, "endangered morality" is followed by the sentence "If there should be a cynic

in our midst, he probably would call that love of morality an unhappy or unrequited love." which has been bracketed and crossed out by hand.

The typescript reads "But the historians [. . .]." "But" has been crossed out, while the "t" in "the" has been capitalized by hand.

Commas after "conviction," "passion," and "city of pigs" inserted by hand.

For Glaukon's protest, see *Republic*, 372c–d; see also Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1964), pp. 93–96.

In the typescript, "It was the *same* passion" is preceded by "The same passion turned," which has been crossed out.

Comma after "less intelligent form" inserted by hand.

Quotation marks have been added by hand around "the subhuman . . . *Grossstadt*" and "cultural bolshevism (*Kulturbolschevismus*)."

The passage "as is shown by the examples of Plato and Rousseau, if examples are needed at all" has been added by hand at the bottom of the typescript, with a sign indicating it should be inserted at this point.

"was" added by hand to replace "is," which has been crossed out.

"a *sound* demand" was added by hand to replace "basically sound," which has been crossed out.

Parentheses around "One . . . facts" have been added by hand.

In the typescript, "sound" has been crossed out and replaced, by hand, by "not entirely unsound."

Page 5 of the typescript carries the title "German Nihilism," followed by two paragraphs which largely repeat the first two paragraphs above. Both the title and the two paragraphs have been crossed out. Presumably, this is where a first draft of the typescript began. Professor Strauss probably added the first four pages later on: after the two deleted paragraphs, the text continues with a paragraph marked "4," suggesting that he intended to skip the original beginning and continue the lecture at this point. With a view to completeness, the editors have included the two paragraphs below:

German Nihilism

1. (crossed out) What is nihilism? And how far can nihilism be said to be a specifically German phenomenon? I shall try—not indeed to answer these questions, but to elaborate them a little. For the phenomenon with which I have to deal, is much too complex to permit of an adequate description within the short time at my disposal. I cannot do more than to scratch the surface. I thank in advance the discussion speakers who will, no doubt, help me and the passive part of the audience toward greater clarity about a phenomenon which is so important to all of us.

2. (crossed out) When we hear at the present time the expression "German nihilism," most of us naturally think at once of National Socialism. It must however be understood from the outset that National Socialism is only one form of German nihilism—its lowest, most provincial, most unintelligent and most dishonourable form. It is probably its very lowness which accounts for its great, if appalling, successes. These successes may be followed by failures and ultimately by complete defeat. Yet the defeat of National Socialism will not necessarily mean the end of German nihilism. For that nihilism has deeper roots than the preachings of Hitter, Germany's defeat in the ("First" crossed out) World War and all that.

7. "4." inserted by hand.

"emotions" added by hand to replace the word "feelings," which has been crossed out. Underlining added by hand.

8. The typescript has "backward," with the latter part crossed out.

Above "interesting," the word "alluring" has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

"the withering away of the State," has been inserted by hand.

"spiritual" has been added by hand to replace "material," which has been crossed out.

"material" has been added by hand to replace "spiritual," which has been crossed out.

"Wir aber stehen mitten im Experiment; wir treiben Dinge, die durch keine Erfahrung begründet sind. Söhne, Enkel und Urenkel von Gottlosen, denen selbst der Zweifel verdächtig geworden ist, marschieren wir durch Landschaften, die das Leben mit höheren und tieferen Temperaturen bedrohen." Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter; Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt, 1932), pp. 193–94; *Werke: Essays* II (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1963), Bd. 6, p. 214). ["We, however, stand in the middle of the experiment; we are attempting things that have no foundation in experience. Sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of godless men, to whom even doubt has become suspect, we march through landscapes that threaten life with higher and lower temperatures" (our translation).]

Above "latest," the word "last" has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

Comma after "clear language" added by hand.

"the" before "potentialities" added to replace "its" which has been crossed out.

The words "-anarchist-pacifist" have been inserted by hand.

9. The underlining of the first "if" has been crossed-out.

Colon after "in other words" inserted by hand.

"they admitted" inserted by hand.

After "all rational argument" the typescript continues "[. . .] they knew of, i.e. all historical argument, i.e. all statements, based on analysis of the previous development and of the present situation, about the probable future [. . .]." This part of the sentence has been crossed out. It recurs, with some modifications, in the next sentence.

"was," after "all rational argument" added by hand, replaces "were," which has been crossed out.

The words "For that modern," together with the previous sentence, have been inserted in the typescript by hand.

The sentence reading "astrology [. . .] academic youth" has been inserted by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text.

This last sentence has been inserted by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+"-sign indicating it should be added to the previous sentence.

10. "5" added by hand to replace "3."

"un-" added by hand to "able" after "constitutional."

"as" inserted by hand to replace "who," which has been crossed out.

The section reading "of the political [. . .] the fact" has been added by hand to replace the section "on the results of the elections, of what was," which has been crossed out.

"children's vote" has been added by hand to replace "suffrage of children," which has been crossed out.

"not in all" added by hand to replace "in some," which has been crossed out.

"ever" added by hand after "senility" to replace "was never," which has been crossed out.

"however short" inserted by hand.

The long passage, "I have [. . .] Social Research," has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating it should be inserted after "Hindenburg."

"asserted" added by hand to replace "showed," which has been crossed out.

"more" is a surmise of the editors, as the word is difficult to read.

Carl Mayer, "On the Intellectual Origin of National Socialism," *Social Research* 9 (May 1942): 225–47.

11. Illegible word following "Schmitt" added by hand above the line.

The typescript reads "Juenger," but as Professor Strauss uses "Jünger" further on, the editors have changed the spelling throughout.

"seemed" replaces "seems," of which the last letter has been crossed out.

The words "consist of *pueris decantata*, of" have been added and underlined by hand, to replace "be," which has been crossed out.

The typescript reads "principles" before "of progress": the "s" has been crossed out.

The sentence reading "For technical perfection [. . .]. Or, if you wish," has been added by hand to replace the single word "For," which has been crossed out.

"The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk." (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], p. 13.)

"after the defeat in Flanders" is a typewritten insertion.

"Their Finest Hour" (a speech delivered first by Winston S. Churchill to the House of Commons and then broadcast, June 18, 1940), in *Into Battle* (London: Cassell and Company, 1943), pp. 225–34.

Professor Strauss is referring to Oswald Spengler. See *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (München: Oskar Beck, 1923), Bd. 1, p. 49 [Einleitung, 13]; *The Decline of the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), p. 36 [Introduction, sec. 13]. At Cannae, located in Apulia, the Romans suffered a crushing defeat in the Second Punic War against Hannibal (216 B.C.).

12. "6." inserted by hand.

"History" added by hand to replace "the world mind," which has been crossed out.

"who" after "midwife" added by hand to replace "which," which has been crossed out.

The "H" in "History" has been capitalized by hand.

The sentence "For if reason" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+" sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text, with "reason" added by hand, to replace "it," which has been crossed out.

"the very highest power of man," has been inserted by hand.

Goethe, *Faust* I, 1851–55.

13. "7." inserted by hand to replace "5."

In the typescript, "a" has been changed to "an" before "orderly."

The words "for I know [. . .] forgiven" have been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a "+" sign indicating it should be inserted at this point in the text. Parentheses have been inserted by the editors for reasons of clarity.

14. See Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*, I, 30–54.

Livy, *The History of Rome*, XXV, xxxi, 5–11.

Commas preceding and following the words "and enjoy" have been added by hand.

15. The typescript reads "[man]'s place in the universe," which has been crossed out in favor of "the universe and man."

"from time to time" is a typewritten insertion.

Semi-colon after "this or that man" inserted by hand.

In the typescript, "inability" is followed by "to bear, and," which has been crossed out.

"or other" is a typewritten insertion.

16. In the typescript, "with" is followed by the word "disinterested," which has been crossed out.

Commas after "discipline" and "assert" inserted by hand.

17. Comma after "advantage" inserted by hand.

18. "8." inserted by hand to replace "6."

The sentence reading "Japan . . . Germany" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating where it should be inserted in the text.

"or" added by hand to replace "and," which has been crossed out, before both "of nations" and "of cultures."

The sentence reading "Different cultures . . . *science*" has been added by hand at the bottom of the page, with a sign indicating where it should be inserted in the text.

19. "9." inserted by hand to replace "7."

Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939).

20. "and even rejection" has been inserted by hand.

Aristotle, *Politics*, II, vii, 1269a.

"—and every past is as such impressive—" has been inserted by hand.

"Bellarmine" has been added by hand to replace "Bossuet," which has been crossed out.

21. Comma after "Judaism" added by the editors in conformity with the text of Rauschning.

22. The typescript reads "had probably": a handwritten sign indicates that the order should be reversed.

The typescript reads "had doubtless": a handwritten sign indicates that the order should be reversed.

John Dillinger (1902–34) was a famous American bank robber in the twenties and thirties.

"a political movement without" has been added by hand to replace the words "lack of," which have been crossed out.

"non-entity" has been added by hand to replace "chimaera," which has been crossed out.

"a political movement without" has been added by hand to replace "lack of," which has been crossed out.

"would have" has been added by hand to replace "had," which has been crossed out.

23. ":" has been added after "aims" by the editors for reasons of clarity.

Comma inserted by hand after "destroy."

24. "form" has been added by typewriter to replace "have," which has been crossed out.

The typescript continues after "salesman" with "with the possible exception of their foreign minister," which has been crossed out.

Comma after "For" inserted by hand.

"even" is a typewritten insertion.

"Das" instead of "Dies" in the German text (see Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 1932, p. 201; *Werke*, Bd. 6, 1963, p. 221).

25. The typescript has "destruction," after "the business of" with the latter part crossed out and corrected by hand.

26. "Der ewige Friede ist ein Traum, und nicht einmal ein schöner, und der Krieg ein Glied in Gottes Weltordnung. In ihm entfalten sich die edelsten Tugenden des Menschen, Muth und Entsagung, Pflichttreue und Opferwilligkeit mit Einsetzung des Lebens. Ohne den Krieg würde die Welt im Materialismus versumpfen." ("Permanent peace is a dream, and not even a beautiful one, and war is a law of God's order in the world, by which the noblest virtues of man, courage and self-denial, loyality and self-sacrifice, even to the point of death, are developed. Without war the world would deteriorate into materialism.") Letter to Dr. J. K. Bluntschli, 11 December 1880, in *Field-Marshal Count Helmuth von Moltke as a Correspondent*, trans. Mary Herms (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), p. 272. German text: Helmuth von Moltke, *Gesammelte Schriften und Denkwürdigkeiten* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1892), Bd. 5, p. 194.

27. "made" replaces the word "recognized," which has been crossed out.

"Über den Schmerz," in *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlaganstalt, 1934), pp. 154–213, in particular p. 213 (*Werke: Essays* I [Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1960], pp. 151–98, in particular p. 197).

""—das *System*—"" has been inserted by hand.

28. Comma after "To explain German militarism" inserted by hand.

"militarism," in "To discover the root of . . ." is a typewritten insertion, replacing the word "civilisation," which has been crossed out.

"the history of" has been inserted by hand.

Semi-colon after "best policy" inserted by hand.

In the typescript only the parenthesis at the end of "The two most famous . . ." is printed. The lapidary style of the sentence, however, suggests that Professor Strauss intended this to be an aside remark. For this reason, the editors have added the opening parenthesis. Above the words "The two most famous," there is a sign referring to a handwritten note at the bottom of the page, reading "Cf. also More's "hedonistic" utopia ≠ Plato's austere *Republic*."

In the typescript, "honour of Germany" is followed by a sentence which has been crossed out entirely: "But the way in which this reaction was effected, was too much determined by the polemic attitude against the enlightenment."

"the object of enlightened" has been inserted by hand.

"as well as commonsense (*Verständigkeit*)" has been inserted by hand.

In the margin of the typscript, next to the sentence "Opposing . . . philosophy" there is a sign referring to a handwritten note at the bottom of the page, reading "An amusing example in Grote's History of Greece, vol. 8, Everyman, p. 342, n. 1." The editors were unable to trace the reference to Grote's *History of Greece*.

Before "flower," the word "fine" has been crossed out.

29. "modern" before "civilisation" has been added by typewriter to replace "Western," which has been crossed out.

Before "*real*," the word "return" has been crossed out in the typescript.

"interpreted" after "i.e." has been inserted by typewriter.

The words "and therefore distorted" have been added by hand.

30. The words "It may [. . .] from" have been inserted by hand to replace "In his," which has been crossed out.

The words "which [. . .] subject" have been inserted by hand, to replace "we read," which has been crossed out.

Brackets around "Newton" have been added by hand.

"in a word" has been added by hand, to replace "therefore," which has been crossed out. Commas have been added by the editors.

"stood up" has been inserted by hand to replace "arose," which has been crossed out.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 252–53.

Above the word "radicalism," the word "profoundness" has been added by hand, possibly as an alternative.

"–" has been inserted by hand, to replace a comma.

In the typescript, "the" before "classical" is followed by "ideal of," which has been crossed out.

31. Following "doubt:" the sentence "it are the English, and not the Germans, who deserve to be an imperial nation" has been crossed out.

"populos" has been inserted by hand. See Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 851.

The words "to spare the vanquished and to crush the arrogant" have been added by hand beneath the text with a sign. See Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 853. After "*superbos*" the following handwritten words have been crossed out: "; not the way of Ariovistus, but only the way of Caesar and Augustus is the road to empire."